

Deconstructing the Monologic Systems of Thought: Derrida and Paul de Man

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Abstract

This article aims to highlight Paul de Man and Derrida's approaches to deconstruction. It seeks also to point to the deconstructive approach in redefining the conceptual systems associated with the philosophy of Western Metaphysics. In this concern, it focuses on deconstruction as a device for undermining the very foundation of Western thought that presupposes a form of rationality or metaphysical certainty in terms which operate as centering principles, including being, essence, substance, truth, form, man and God, etc.; and other humanistic conceptual systems operating as binary oppositions, such as (body/soul, man/woman, light/darkness, rhetorical/fictional, and literal/metaphorical).

The paper comes to the conclusion that deconstruction aims to draw attention to the "otherness" in all systems of human thought. In this sense, deconstruction becomes a master metaphor for the whole of human experience outside the bounds of the enclosure of Western metaphysics, as well as a strategy to lay bare the fixed standards of human thought that stand as a hurdle before the humanistic enterprise of education.

Keywords: Dconstruction-Logocentrism-Phonocentrism-Plural-Systems f Thought-Signifying Systems-Being-Essence, Substance, Body/Soul-Fictional/Rhetorical- Literal/ Metaphorical

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تفكيك أنظمة الفكر أحادية المنطق: دريدا وباول دومان

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ملخص

يهدف البحث إلى القاء الضوء على مفهومي ديريدا وباول دو مان للتفكيك؛ وإبراز دور هذا الفكر في إعادة صياغة الأسس الفكرية التي قامت عليها حضارة الغرب، والتي تفترض مسبقاً وجود نوع من المنطق والصدقية التي ترقى إلى مستوى اليقين في مصطلحات، ومفاهيم أساسية تشمل الوجود، المادة، الجوهر، الحقيقة، الشكل، الإنسان، والله الخ؛ بالإضافة إلى نظرية هذا الفكر في قراءة النص الأدبي، ونظرته تجاه الكتابة، والقراءة، والكلام، وأنظمة معرفية أخرى تعطي أسبقية لمفاهيم فكرية على أخرى في ثنائيات فكرية مرتبة بصورة هرمية، يكون فيها الحد الأول المركز الذي يتلوه الحد التالي بصفة تابعاً له (كالروح/ الجسد، الرجل/ المرأة، الضوء/ الظلام، المعنى المجازي/ المعنى الحرفي، السرد/ البلاغة) الخ.

يخلص البحث إلى اعتبار نظرية التفكيك وسيلة لعرض الوجه الآخر الكامن لجميع الأفكار التي تشكل منها الفكر البشري. وبهذا المعنى يصبح التفكيك مجازاً شاملاً يلخص التجربة الإنسانية برمتها خارج حدود أنظمة الفكر الغربية أحادية المنطق والمتزمتة، سواء أكانت تلك الأنظمة الفكرية دينية أم وضعية، ليصب في خدمة المشروع الإنساني الثقافي، والتربوي، والفكري.

الكلمات الدالة: التفكيك - أحادي المنطق - متعدد المنطق - أنظمة الفكر، أنظمة الإشارة، الكون، المادة، الروح، الجسد، المجاز، الكناية، البلاغة.

Derrida focuses his critique in his *Grammatology* on breaking the hold of phonocentric tradition that privileges speech over writing. According to this traditional way of thinking, the word underwrites the full presence of the world: it is the cause of the presence from which all originating systems of thought later erupted. Words, though written, appear to have emitted from a living body whose originating thoughts are spoken, rather than written. Thus, Derrida contends that privileging speech over writing is a classic feature of logocentrism, from Plato onwards, that placed writing in a secondary position to the spoken word. Moreover, he argues that "Western philosophy develops from a series of restrictive presuppositions predicated on the illusion of 'hearing/understanding- oneself-speak'" (Anderson: "Deconstruction": 139).

Though Derrida bases his contention on Saussure's argument relating to the linguistic sign which consists of a signifier and signified, he tries to evolve his own theory in language. He diverges from Saussure not only in his concept of erasure where the traces of the absent signs are there in the present signs, but also in his concept of the French term "différance". He finds in the term a spatial concept relating to the meaning of the term as "to differ", and a temporal concept relating to the meaning of the word as to "defer"; in the first example, as Selden argues "the sign emerges from a system of differences which are spaced out within the system", which in the second case, "signifiers enforce an endless postponement of 'presence'" (Selden: *A Reader's Guide*: 88). Thus, Derrida views language as a sign system of differences where the present is constantly deferred, and the traces of the absent signs make "the possibility of saying anything with finality" impossible, as Bijay Kumar Das puts it (*Twentieth Century Literary Theory*: 152). Henceforth, Derrida concentrates his argument on the term "différance" itself and the traces which are there within it, holding it thus as "a structure and a movement no longer conceivable on the basis of the opposition presence/ absence. 'Difference' is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, and of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other" (Derrida: "Positions": 388). Derrida is at pains here to break the hold of the logocentric tradition which privileges the spoken language over the written. He wrestles himself free from the restraints imposed on the attitude toward language and meaning as a sign system of positive terms, where the priority is given to spoken forms over written ones.

Derrida, however, adopts Saussure's insight in this concern that in "language there are only differences without positive terms"(de Saussure: *Course in General Linguistics*: 120), but he departs from him in his view of language and meaning in writing as "a free play" of differences without any centre. He "follows the negative characteristic of the sign —absence— to its extreme implications through the analysis of difference without positive terms" (Anderson: 140). Thus, though Derrida postulates that we can never break free from the conceptual universe we

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inherit, we can still question the assumption that one pole in a binary opposition has precedence over the other (e.g., body/soul, good/bad, speech/writing, etc.,).

Derrida's assumption above arises from his conviction that neither speech can be given priority over writing, nor writing can be privileged over speech, as there is no conceptual centre that can hold a primacy over the other. This is because meaning in either pole is a result of difference which is always deferred. There is always an element of indeterminacy or 'play' in the unstable sign. Meaning is always in a state of slippage, as it can never be mastered or controlled: this leads to an emphasis on the signifier and on textuality rather than on the signified and meaning: what is new in Derrida is the idea that the text's signifying process is open for reading up and re-reading without respect for the signified; the signifier slips and slides evading the grasp of the truth of the signified. Derrida illustrates this point most evidently in his well-known essay entitled "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences":

There is no transcendental or privileged signified and that the domain or play of signification henceforth has no limit, one must reject even the concept and word 'sign' itself- which is precisely what cannot be done. For the signification 'sign' has always been understood and determined, in its meaning, as sign- of, a signifier referring to a signified, a signifier different from its signified (*Modern Literary Theory*: 152).

The reader, as such, is free to enter the text from any route, to freely open and close the text's signifying process, and to follow at will the defiles of the signifier as it slips under the signified in a moment in difference. Derrida thus undermines the very foundation of Western thought that presupposes a form of rationality or metaphysical certainty in terms which operate as centering principles: being, essence, substance, truth, form, man, and God etc.

Derrida's technique questions the rationalism and phonocentrism of Western thought which "presupposes a 'presence' behind language and text- a 'presence' such as an idea, an intention, a truth, a meaning or a reference for which language acts as a subservient and convenient vehicle of expression", as Philip Rice and Waugh argue (*Ibid.*: 147). This conclusion, as such, brings us back to the basic argument of this paper, namely, deconstructing the monologic systems of human thought, not only in Western philosophy, but also in literature as an essential terrain where human thoughts compete and contest. Derrida's ideology has particular repercussions on the literary text: it has undermined the text's own assumptions, dividing it against itself, and breaking its logocentrism. Hence, deconstruction begins, namely, "when we locate the moment when a text transgresses the laws it appears to set up for itself" (Selden: 90).

To illustrate Derrida's ideology in this concern, we can take Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Three cases will be addressed in the novel, namely, how a text would be read, what the signification process would mean in the reading process, and how structure of a text would be considered in the light of a deconstructive ideology of reading. In *Gammatology* Derrida refers to the deconstructive practice of reading not as "an ambitious engagement with Western metaphysics but as a radical questioning of the assumptions we make in the everyday activity of reading" (Tallack: *Deconstruction: Theory at Work*: 159). In this sense, reading *Heart of Darkness* can take two routes: our understanding of the novel can be concretized either according to the importance Conrad attached to establishing a certain point of view, or according to other readings that trace a central theme in the novel as opposed to other derivative or minor themes. Thus, reading the novel may be grounded upon a hierarchical opposition in which one term is seen as primary and the other as secondary. It is this inevitable incompleteness of the novel which provokes a deconstructive reading of *Heart of Darkness*, where the text is read against its own logic, in order to bring out those elements which are marginalized, overlooked or already assumed. Barbara Johnson in her *The Critical Difference* makes this point clear when confirming that "'deconstruction' ... is an attempt to follow the subtle, powerful effects of differences already at work within the illusion of a binary opposition" (x).

As for the concept of meaning that arises from signification, Derridean model of deconstruction endorses Saussure's approach to meaning and language, where "in language there are only differences without positive terms" (*Course in General Linguistics*:120). According to this assumption, "meaning arises differentially through the relation between arbitrary, signs and not through the reference of a sign to something that pre-exists it", as Tallak puts it (161). A deconstructive reading of *Heart of Darkness*, for instance, reveals that there is no stable meaning/s in the novel, as signification itself is seen as an endless play of meanings that transgresses any enclosure or pre-existing structure in the novel. Once a particular structure or enclosure is established in the novel by a particular reader, other concepts within the hierarchical structure of a binary opposition arise to destabilize the already established structures of meanings. This practice, according to a deconstructive reading, is an endless referral or play of meanings, where "every concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or a system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts", as Derrida contends ('Difference': in *Speech and Phenomena*: 140). In this sense, the reading process of *Heart of Darkness* is subject to the differential movement of language between arbitrary chain of signs, where every structure of meaning/s supposedly contains its opposite.

In "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (1966), Derrida exposes his theory of 'structurality', arguing that we objectify a structure "by a process of giving it a center". He also argues that the meaning of a text lies inside the text constituting a center, as part of the structure of signs, as well as outside the text by escaping the very structure which assumedly contains it (*Modern Literary Theory*: 150-151). Thus, "freeplay" is the consequence of the lack of a center that lies inside and outside a structure of a text (Ibid. 151), creating a kind of competing or balancing interpretations. In *Heart of Darkness*, the structure can be viewed in the light of these competing interpretations that keep the structure of the novel oscillating between the two forces working inside and outside the text. We discern in the novel a certain closure that stands for reality, for truth, and relatively speaking, for a superior kind of consciousness. Kurtz represents this kind of down-to-earth reality. He objectifies the human nature with all its eccentricities and abnormalities. He shows all those hidden savage parts of the human nature: excessive love of ivory, formidable desire for money, and brutality of treatment of native Africans etc. On the other hand, the outside structure of meaning that defies the inside structure can be defined by certain readers as a competing or a balancing interpretation to the original one. In the light of this interpretation, Kurtz is seen as a man standing for the darker side of our nature, which is a normal rather than an eccentric phenomenon. Here the opposing forces of interpretations compete and contend to unify the laws of a structure in the novel, that help establish a center around which the various meaning/s of the novel meet.

These laws, however, constitute for deconstructionists, including Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, J.Hillis Miller and Harold Bloom, the heterogeneity of texts for which a deconstructive reading must account. Hence, deconstructive criticism proceeds to disrupt the binary oppositions associated with logocentrism, which formulate the heterogeneous laws that go into the making of the fabric of the text. Like Derrida, Paul de Man focuses his attention on resolving the heterogeneous entities of the literary text; while Derrida questions the distinction between speech and writing, Paul de Man interrogates those distinctions between the 'literal' and the "figurative". In the often cited essay "semiology and Rhetoric," Paul de Man calls our attention to the signifying process of language as a whole. He argues that interpretations traditionally erase the conventional boundary between fiction and reality emphasizing metaphysical certainty that guarantees being as presence.

This interpretive strategy lacks coherence because it fails to see the repressive effect of the elements of which the literary text is made up, including the conflicting forces of signification in the text: grammar/meaning, semiology/rhetoric, and the literal/the figurative. In *Allegories of reading*, for instance, de Man develops a "rhetorical" type of deconstruction concerned with the theory of "tropes", which pervade language: "Figures of speech (tropes) allow writers to say one thing but refer to something else, by substituting one meaning

for another (metaphor) or displacing meaning from one sign in a chain to another (metonymy). "Tropes", as such' have a disruptive effect on language, which destabilizes logic, and momentarily creates difficulties in communication between the text and the reader, and thereby denies language the possibility of a literal or a referential usage.

What de Man is apt to show is that the effects of rhetoric prevent a direct representation of the real, and that leads us to disrupt grammar, and forces us to suppress its implications. For this reason, de Man argues that "metaphor has come to be regarded as the virtual land-mark of creative language, the means by which it breaks with the normal run of day-to-day 'literal' usage" (Norris: *Deconstruction*: 101-2). This means that language is always contaminated with figurality. De Man thus seems to ground his theory on a Nietzschean perspective that language is essentially figurative rather than expressive or referential. This notion has been succinctly summarized by de Man in the following words:

This gives the language considerable freedom from referential restraint, but it makes it epistemologically highly suspect and volatile, since its use can no longer be said to be determined by considerations of truth and falsehood, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, or pleasure or pain. Whenever this autonomous potential of language can be revealed by analysis, we are dealing with literariness and, in fact, with literature as the place where this negative knowledge about the reliability of linguistic utterance is made available ("The Resistance to Theory": *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*: 159)

This leads on to the argument that texts always generate 'aberrant' readings, or 'misreadings', because 'tropes' inevitably intervene between literary and critical texts; critical writing thus fails to attain a level of perfect clarity and truth, as literary texts themselves are self-deconstructing, in de Man's terms: "a literary text simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode" (Quoted in Selden's *Contemporary Literary Theory*: 94). The deconstructor, as such, has little to do with the text's own processes, as "the dialectical interplay" set up between the text and the interpreter results only in a correct misreading (de Man: *Blindness and Insight*: 28).

Hence, one may conclude that there is no longer any question of a privileged status for literature over the self-effacing or secondary role of the language of criticism, as critics only achieve insight through a certain blindness: the insight-in-blindness is a kind of an unconscious slide from one unity to another within the interpretative circle of the text; each element in the text is only understood in the light of the general framework of the text as a whole. The interpretative movement thus becomes an essential part of a complex process which produces literary form. In other words, critics' desire for unraveling all the particulars of the literary text, or

Deconstructing the Monologic Systems of Thought: Derrida and Paul de Man Ahmad Taha discovering all possible terrains of meaning implicit in the text, leads to "the hermeneutic circle" of interpretation, where the boundaries of a "literary text" and the techniques used by criticism are effaced. For de Man, this interpretative circularity result from "the dialectical interplay" between text and interpreter; as the critic usually directs "his patient and delicate attention to the reading of forms, he pragmatically enters into the hermeneutic circle of interpretation mistaking it for the organic circularity of natural processes" (Ibid.: 29).

De man here fully accepts the Derridean principle that writing, with its own dialectic of insight and blindness, is privileged over all the categories which traditional Western philosophy had attempted to impose on it, including speech. On this basis, de Man, like Derrida, tries to break the hold of monologic tradition that gives priority to speech over writing. While Derrida refuses to assign any positive terms for the play of differences among signs, de Man refuses "the system of priorities which has traditionally governed the relation between 'critical' and 'creative' language (Norris: *Deconstruction*: 23). Western philosophy presupposes that the written text has inherent or self-possessed plenitude of meaning that can be only referred to or hinted at by the critical language. Assigning fixed meaning/s for literary texts, for Derrida, is another sign of the prejudices of the Western philosophy against writing. Thus, the inherent truth/s in the written texts about which the Western theorizing revolves, for Derrida, emerges from the Western mistrust of language. Such a consideration leads to a radical reevaluation of the presence of the boundaries that mark off 'literature' from 'criticism'. Henceforth, critical texts, for de Man, should be read not for their interpretative "insights", but rather for "the blindness" implicit in them, something which reveals their conceptual limits: "critical texts have to be read with the same awareness of ambivalence that is brought to the study of non-critical literary texts" (Ibid.: 110). This means that the traditional role of the critic which is restricted to unfolding the embedded authentic meaning of the text is denied; thus, the text loses its traditional status which attaches to it certain phonocentric priorities that give it its final shape; it becomes an open-ended terrain where perplexities of meaning compete and contest to produce more revealing moments of blindness than anything in the discourse of philosophy. De Man puts this idea in the following words:

Literature as well as criticism- the difference between them being delusive- is condemned (or privileged) to be for ever the most rigorous and, consequently the most unreliable language in terms of which man names and transforms himself (Allegories of Reading: 60).

Such has been the effect of Derrida's postulations not only on the conservative traditions of the American modes of writing, but also on the structuralist successors of Saussure, who consider that all social practices or cultural systems could be studied from a "synchronic" viewpoint that reveals the differential relations in a sign system operating on the model of language. Thus deconstructing a text may be

understood as an endless analytical process of dissemination and subversion of familiar meaning. The text, according to this view, is treated as "a pre-text for further writing, where all the sources of modernism- in particular- Joycean wordplay- may be used to enact the critic's meaning", as Leonard Jackson contends (Jackson: *The Poverty of Structuralism*: 197). The contribution which Derrida has made to this view seems to be ambivalent: it cuts both ways when it comes to his impact on de Man. From one perspective, Derrida's deconstructive method denies de Man the kind of methodical approach which has been the recurrent dream of the critical tradition from Plato down to Wordsworth and Eliot. On the other hand, it offers him a way beyond the rigid separation of roles when it comes to defining the critic's position vis-à-vis the literary text.

Derrida uses the deconstructive method to show how the rhetorical nature of texts undermines the philosophical implications of the text itself. De Man does much the same for literature and criticism, seeing them alike "as virtually defined by self-undermining quality (Ibid.: 198). A deconstructive reading as such, undermines the text's self-autonomy challenging the unity and coherence which logocentrism variously attempts to identify in the text. In other words, de Man's and Derrida's critical strategies consider texts as inevitably incomplete, because a text is particularly "read against its own logic or 'machine' by fastening upon the over-looked, marginal, assumed or excessive element ... which cannot be accounted for in any principle of unity controlling the limits of the text", as Tallak puts it.⁽¹⁾

A deconstructive reading thus reveals this circular 'play' of meanings in the literary or critical texts, transgressing the very structures supposedly containing the unity of the text itself. Barbara Johnson explains these claims in her *The Critical Difference* most succinctly: " The way in which a text thus differs from itself is never simple: it has a certain rigorous, contradictory logic whose effects can, up to a certain point, be read" according to a deconstructive principle which follows "the subtle, powerful effects of difference already at work" within the binary oppositions constituting the dialogism of the text (Johnson: *The Critical Difference*: X-xiii) This statement brings us back to the assumption of this article that a deconstructive reading, in the broadest sense of the term, insists that a text cannot be enclosed, as the minutiae of the text, cannot be traced "outside of the text" itself, as Derrida declares himself in his *Of Grammatology* (Derrida: *Of Grammatology*: 158). In this sense, deconstruction may

(1). For further details about this view, see Douglas Tallak. "Deconstruction: Henry James, *In the Cage*." *Literary Texts at Work: Three Texts*. Ed. Douglas Tallak. (London: B T Batsford, 1991), p. 160-70.

be understood not as a neutral approach to the text, but rather a strategic intervention in its signifying process to demonstrate that the opposition is always

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already 'other', and that a deconstructive reading attempts to displace "the unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another" (Quoted by Anderson: "Deconstruction": 143).

Hence, Derrida claims that all textuality is always already heterogeneous rather than homogeneous, and dialogic rather than monologic; the Derridean standpoint thus outlines a metaphysics outside the logocentrism" or the "metaphysical enclosure" within which all Western philosophy has worked out its hypotheses. In this metaphysics, a generalized textuality, rather than 'phonocentric' textuality, with meaning disseminated all over this world of text, becomes a master metaphor for all human life and practices. Such a view derives from a deconstructive attitude toward meaning and language, namely, meaning is not a transcendental value as much as an

interpretative process; and language is not a verbal embodiment of truths of life or of knowledge as much as a reflection of the knowledge embedded in the text. In sum, deconstruction pushes language and interpretation to their limits to point to those forces which repress differences or the creative play of meaning in the text, in order to create a new logic based on the plurality of meaning always already at work in textuality. Geoffery Hartman expresses this view in the following words:

There is not absolute knowledge but rather a textual infinite, an interminable web of texts or interpretations. Indeterminacy functions as a bar separating understanding and truth ... If seems too radical a perspective, there remains the puzzle that the reception of literary works is usually accompanied by an uneasiness about their reduction to meaning ... Reading itself becomes the project: we read to understand what is involved in reading as a form of life, rather than to resolve what is read into glossy ideas (Criticism in the Wilderness: *The Theory of Criticism*: 396-97).

It is plain, as Hartman's argument suggests above that a destruction- or "deconstruction"- aims at discovering the boarder zones of the language of philosophy, and the language of human thought, in order to turn its momentum against itself. This is the purpose of Derrida's effort "to use the concept to rise above the concept", in Adorno's terms, or to hypostatize meaning into intelligible objects to "know one's way around" a kind of practical knowledge- without which linguistic communication in a common language, would be unthinkable, as Wittgenstien argues (See "Metaphysics at the Moment of its Fall": *Contemporary Literary Theory*: 44).

In fact, one could argue that the Derridean philosophy about language and meaning may be compared to de Man's rhetorical strategies in certain respects: de Man's concept about extracting meaning relies on his assumption that the

innermost logic of the text can be drawn out at "greatest blindness" which can be held to be moments of "greatest insights" for critics (*Blindness and Insight*: 109). On the hand, de Man bases his argument totally on the assumption that language is suspended between metaphor and metonymy, between "the semantic function and the formal structure of language"(Ibid.: 60). Similarly, the Derridean deconstructive method suspends the phonocentric (or meaningful) force in the interests of a slippery or figurative logic of language. Moreover, de Man, like Nietzsche and Derrida, dismisses the traditional idea of "rhetoric" as eloquence, and concentrates instead on tropes, revealing their false claims to truth; he views language, following in the steps of Derrida, as a discourse suspended between the critic and the text, "a dialogue of questions that is a mutual coercion." The critic and the text question each other mutually. They are "caught in an evitable and ceaseless oscillation in which neither text nor critic dominates" (Atkins: *Reading Deconstruction*: 87-89).

According to this view, the critic's role, from a deconstructive point of view, becomes insubordinate to the text; as the critic can freely question all the traditional attributes of the literary meaning of textuality: the text, as such, loses its autonomy, when the critic wrestles himself free from the traditional restrictions imposed on him as a mere attendant upon the sovereignty of the text: deconstruction thus would gain, through a constant critique of its full momentum only, the primal authority of the text, where all the traditional logocentric assumptions of the literary meaning/s are questioned.

Derrida presents himself as anti-metaphysician: "He detects within the phenomenological framework a master category which governs everything that the phenomenologist supposes to exist: presence" (*The Poverty of Structuralism*: 174). In spite of the difficulty of defining the concept of presence in terms of the Western philosophy, Derrida in *Of Grammatology* (1967) gives a partial list of historical meanings for it. He concentrates his critique of the concept of 'presence' on the antithetical assumption of the term itself, namely, non-presence, a state that can be covered by a single master category named "difference." Deconstruction of the phonocentric assumptions of the Western philosophy starts from finding "difference" in these assumptions, by giving a systematic account of the ultimate underlying systems of the world and of the text as a world. To make his strategy forceful, he "tries to undermine such distinctions as that between playful and serious uses of language; or between the literal and assertoric, on the one hand, and metaphorical, rhetorical and fictional on the other" (Ibid.: 176).

This conclusion leads us to suggesting that deconstruction, for the most part of its strategy, aims at liberating human thought from the logocentrism or the enclosure of Western Metaphysics. This is the ground of the deconstructive appeal,

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which found roots in the theories of a great number of literary theorists including
de Man, Bloom, White, Hartman and J. Hillis Miller.

Derrida assumes that metaphysics gives precedence to transcendental and mystical concepts over empirical disciplines. He stands with this assumption against other claims which consider metaphysics as nothing more than a set of empty categories originally derived from the empirical disciplines, especially those claims which consider metaphysics as a derivative from the structure of language. Derrida argues against this assumption, because he probably considers that "philosophy" (being the ultimate source for metaphysics) is not only before linguistics in the way that one can be faced with a new science, outlook, or object", but "also before linguistics in the sense of preceding, providing it with its concepts for better or worse" (Derrida: "The Supplement of Copula": *Margins of Philosophy*: 188-89).

In this sense, Derrida raises metaphysics above all sciences, including natural sciences. This seems to be a strong claim: metaphysics is held to be a major umbrella for all other studies, including the critical, the political and aesthetic theories, which must be compatible with the principles and postulations of metaphysics. Though this view has been refuted by many theorists like Benveniste and others, Derrida contrives to maintain that the specialist disciplines (biology, linguistics, physics, politics, etc.) need to be internally consistent with each other, and externally consistent with observation and test. Thus, these sciences will be vacuous without this consistency. This requirement drives Derrida to suggest that the philosophical, ethical, political, and the specialist systems of thought should be formulable with "the exigent, powerful, systematic and irrepressible desire" for a transcendental signified which will "place a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign" (Quoted in *The Poverty of Structuralism*: 173).

Derrida's postulation that there is "a transcendental signified" for every sign brings us back again to our hypothetical entity of this article, namely, deconstruction aims at deconstructing systems of human thought. By doing this he attaches "a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign", that is, a new assumption, which will reverse, or stand in direct contrast to the previous one, though the new assumption will also enter into another cycle of assumption and anti-assumption in an ever-circular movement: "All we can do is to refuse to allow either pole in a conceptual system" (playful/serious, fictional/rhetorical, and metaphorical/literal) "to become the centre and guarantor of presence", as Raman Selden argues (*Contemporary Literary Theory*: 88). Derrida applied his theory of deconstructing the centre as a guarantor of presence not only to specialist disciplines (biology, chemistry, linguistics, physics, etc.), but also to the basic metaphysical assumptions operating as centering principles since Plato: being, essence, substance, form, beginning, end, etc. He comes to the conclusion that either pole in a conceptual system (good/evil, body/soul, man/woman, beginning/

end, fictional/rhetorical, etc.) cannot be hierarchised in either direction without "violence"; thus, deconstruction becomes an-ever going process of addition and substitution, where one pole in a binary opposition will always resist the assertion of a new hierarchy by dislodging the second term from a position of superiority too. This is a temporal as well as a spatial process for Derrida: "every concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or a system, within which it refers to another and to other concept/s, by the systematic play of differences"(Derrida. *Speech and Phenomena*: 140). A deconstructive reading thus shows this endless 'play' of meanings which points to the unstable quality of any 'enclosure' or a conceptual structure of thought.

The most rigorous reading, it follows, is one that holds itself provisionally open to further deconstruction, breaking altogether with its own concepts. This is why Derrida refers so often to the works of Husserl, which defy any settled or definitive reading, following the track of a "self-engendered paradox or an aporia", as Christopher Norris puts it (Deconstruction: 149). This principle of deconstruction has been adopted by Derrida and his rigorous disciple Paul de Man, who pursue deconstruction to its furthest bounds of possibility, especially when it comes down to what he calls the process of reflective understanding of a poetic text devoted to a rhetoric of "pure figuration." In this sense, deconstruction suspends the meaningful force of language in the interests of a purified logic of 'figure'; it follows that 'the logocentric', or naïve reading, as de Man puts it, yields, more or less consciously, to what he calls "a normative pathos or ethical coercion", which leads to textual-rhetorical enclosure. To avoid this impasse, de Man along with Derrida leave no doubt that deconstruction would be the preferred alternative. In the end, de Man's 'canny qualities of disciplines argument thus "advocate the use of epistemologically rigorous methods as the only possible means to reflect on the limitations of those methods" (*Allegories of Reading*: 115).

Thus construction can come up against the gap between itself and the aberrant logocentrism of the text and of the metaphysical assumptions of human thought as a text, only by forcing analysis to the point of 'aporia' or self –contradiction. Such a view derives from the deconstructive attitude toward language and meaning by exposing the "metaphysical enclosure" within which all Western thought is supposed to have taken place; Derrida, as well as Paul de Man implicitly outlined a metaphysics outside this enclosure, "a metaphysics", in Leonard Jackson's words, "in which texts produce worlds" (*The Poverty of Structuralism*: 200). In this metaphysics dissemination of meaning through the spatial world of the text becomes a metaphor for all human experience; and a generalized textuality becomes a master metaphor for the whole of human life. In this meaning, deconstruction seems to have virtually marked out a new domain of argument, by asserting its claim as a self-respecting discipline of human thought.

Moreover, Derrida goes in his critique of Western Philosophy as far as accusing the frequent attempts made by philosophers in the West to present centered systems of thought in place of old ones. By doing so, philosophers ignore the circularity of thoughts, the substitution and the transformational nature of the central ideas of which Western systems of thought consists: systems of thought around which Western philosophy revolves (being, essence, beginning, end, form etc.) cannot be held to be virtual centers, but rather only a violent substitution of a past center. Hence, Derrida critiques this centering process by speaking of a rupture or a decentring of the traditional structure of Western philosophical systems of thought. He accuses philosophers of being blind to what Derrida calls "the structurality of structure," or "the man-made nature of their structures of thought"; he supposes that the center exists within and outside the structure simultaneously, because the structure defines the center, though it is not part of it: in this sense, Derrida attempts to turn Western philosophy against itself "to expose its stress points, to decenter it- to literally deconstruct its structures," as Bill Ramey contends (Ramey: "Deconstruction and Literature": **Files O**: 5).

Traditionally, philosophers have sought to ground their structures on the basic aforesaid self-evident truths; deconstruction challenges the assumptions of philosophy by revealing the structurality that makes these assumptions possible. In other words, the Derridean deconstruction calls into question the Western systems of thought by exposing the hidden assumptions or effaced metaphors inherent in them; by doing so, he attempts to make "Western philosophy aware of itself as discourse, as textuality, as rhetoric" (Ibid.: 6). Derrida, here, is carrying on a "tradition" previously advocated by Kant, Nietzsche and Hume, who are skeptical about the traditional assumptions of philosophy. They assume that our knowledge cannot be matched with external reality in the sense that our knowledge about the world around us is not real: it is a tinted knowledge; thus, "Derrida's version of the Kantian argument makes writing ... the precondition of all possible knowledge," as Norris puts it. For Derrida the same is true of textuality, literature and philosophy; the text, and literature as a text, don't refer to the thing-in-itself, but rather to more writing, or more "supplements or "substitutive significations" that supersede or replace old ones; the same applies to the history of philosophy which is seen as a "history of metaphors and metonymies" ("Sign, Structure, and Play": 150-3). Hence Derrida equates literature with philosophy, as both domains of human thought rely heavily on rhetoric and metaphor.

This suggests that deconstruction is interested in opening up the layers of meanings implied in textuality. Derrida's way of achieving this is to read texts closely, but without rigorous adherence to the rules laid down by the new critics that consider the text as a self-enclosed autonomous body. Derrida's and de Man's rigorous reading, on the contrary, implies a constant substitution and transformation of the center around which Western systems of thought revolves.,

by turning Western logic back onto itself. Derrida throws light on this point in his "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" most succinctly: "The whole history of the concept of structure ... must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center ... as a linked chain of determinations of the center ... The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix ... is the determination of being as presence in all senses of this word" (Ibid.: 151). Deconstruction is therefore an activity performed by texts defying any ultimate or definitive reading. Derrida here comes remarkably close to Husserl's insistence that meaning is always a kind of creative excess that redeems textuality (as a sign system) from the fixity of meaning" (*The Crisis of European Sciences*: passim). This postulation has been adopted by Derrida and some of his more rigorous followers, such as Paul de Man, who pursue deconstruction to the farthest limits of possibilities of meaning. De man's essays in *Blindness and Insight* (1971) seem to be "a powerful application of Derridean ideas to the rhetoric of modern poetics" (Norris: Deconstruction). Hence, Derrida and de Man recourse to terms that cannot be reduced to any single, definitive meaning, in order to avoid the conceptual enclosure of logocentric Western systems of thought, whether in literature or philosophy.

Derrida is seemingly as well aware of the elusiveness of Western philosophical terminology, as he is of language as an endlessly complex and unwieldy medium, where writers fail to have full command of their words. He tries, in other words, to throw into question most of the assumptions already established in Western thought about the various ethical, aesthetic and political issues: writing cannot be given precedence over speech, nor speech can be privileged over writing without conflict between the two terms, and the binary oppositions male/female, human/animal, good/evil cannot be hierarchised in either direction without refusing to allow either pole in the system to become the centre and guarantor of presence. Even the context in which words might be heard or read can always shift, leaving meanings in a state of buoyancy, difficult to pin down. In brief, he and his close friend de Man see a world that is complex, contradictory and plural, refusing to insist on a single cultural tradition, or validity of straightforward truths or accredited values. Nevertheless, Derrida, as his friend de Man emphasizes, is not a nihilist, and his emphasis on one meaning does not mean that there is no meaning at all, but rather meaning is always there by interpretation and reinterpretation.

In the final analysis, one may conclude that to ignore deconstruction's claim as a self-respecting discipline of human thought is to close one's mind to something already other in textuality, an "otherness" or a reworking that logocentrism always attempts to control and repress. In this respect, deconstruction becomes a master metaphor for the whole of human experience outside the bounds of the enclosure associated with the philosophy of Western metaphysics, by refusing to assert "one mode of signifying over another", as Barbara Johnson contends (Translator's

Deconstructing the Monologic Systems of Thought: Derrida and Paul de Man Ahmad Taha
 Introduction to Derrida's *Dissemination*: xiv). As such, the value of deconstruction emerges from its strategy that allows us to lay bare the fixed standards of human thought that would deny the possibility of criticism; to permit us to ask questions without accepting logocentric dogmas blindly; and to open up prospects of interpretation in the interests of the humanistic enterprise of education.

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